

Good evening. I'm Tony Patelunas, a 4th year Ph.D. candidate in Molecular and Cell Biology and President of the UConn Graduate Student Senate. Although I was born and raised in Owego, NY, and I've only lived in Willington, CT for 4 years, Connecticut is home to me. In that short time I've fallen in love with lush forests, the serene trails, and especially the people from this state that surround me.

I'd like to start by thanking you, the committee, for holding this hearing and for granting us the opportunity to speak to you. I'd also like to extend my gratitude to the General Assembly for all the past support UConn has received. That support has truly made a difference in the quality of education UConn can offer, and future support will guarantee that UConn will continue to be a leader of public universities in both education and research.

To give you some background: I completed my undergraduate degree at Stony Brook University, just south of here on Long Island. At that time I was only familiar with UConn because of basketball. After my undergraduate work, I enrolled in New Mexico State University as a Ph.D. student, and it was there, after starting my training to be a researcher, that I learned how outstanding the academics at UConn are.

I applied to UConn and left my program in New Mexico because the Molecular and Cell Biology department at UConn has widely renowned faculty doing world class research. I knew that if I wanted to become a great scientist, I had to train with the best scientists. And what I found on my arrival was not only world-class science, but faculty throughout the university, from all disciplines, that are extraordinary mentors. Without their mentorship I would not be standing here as a Ph.D. candidate with multiple peer-reviewed publications in preparation, a founder of a biotechnology start-up here in CT, and a leader in the UConn community.

It is that community at UConn that returns the state's investment through building a stronger workforce. Numerous biotech companies in Connecticut are looking for qualified researchers every day. If my start-up doesn't succeed, I plan to stay in CT and work for one of those companies while planning for my next business venture. I am not alone in this plan. The Molecular and Cell Biology department at UConn, my department, has a Professional Science Master's program that actively engages with companies throughout Connecticut to place students for internships and jobs. Furthermore, programs at UConn such as the Connecticut Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation in the School of Business and the Technology Incubation Program foster transferring the basic science research that I, and my colleagues, do every day to the business world which grows the state's economy.

I'd like to conclude by reiterating that the strong community and world-class, innovative research at UConn are what drew me to Connecticut for my training. And it is that community and the culture of continued success that will keep me here after graduation. Connecticut's continued investment in UConn will support the current programs but more importantly, will draw more entrepreneurs and researchers to grow Connecticut's economy. Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to speak and giving your time to listen.